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Liberty Hall
Morris Avenue, Union
Near Elizabeth, Union County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, F.A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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Liberty Hall
Morris Avenue, Union
Near Elizabeth, Union County, New Jersey

Owner: John Kean

Date of Erection: 1772-3

Architect:

Builder: Built for William Livingston

Present Condition: Good

Number of Stories: Three; originally two and one-half

Materials of Construction: Foundation - stone

Exterior walls - frame
construction, siding flush
on the older portion

Interior walls - plaster

Inside brick chimneys

Roof - now low pitch,
originally probably gambrel

Historical Data:

On June 26, 1760 William Livingston of New York bought about eighty acres described as part of the homestead of Charles Townley of Elizabethtown; to this he added other purchases bringing the total as estimated by Sedgwick to about one hundred and twenty acres. He moved to Elizabethtown in May 1772 and remained in the village until the fall of 1773 when the house was completed.

William Livingston was born in Albany in 1723. He was graduated from Yale in 1741, studied law, and was admitted to the bar in 1748. For three years he served as a member of the New York Legislature. The piece of property in Elizabeth he acquired with the idea of retiring to the country. As stated above he moved into the mansion which he named Liberty Hall in the fall of 1773. The following year John Jay, then a young lawyer, married here at Liberty Hall Miss Sarah Livingston. That same year, 1774, Livingston was elected deputy to the First Continental Congress; he was reelected to the second and third. In June 1776 Livingston was commissioned Brigadier-General and as such was commander-in-chief of the New Jersey militia. Elected Governor of the State he resigned his commission August 31, 1776. He served as governor from that date until 1790.

The house suffered from marauders during the course of the war and we learn from a letter written by one of Livingston's daughters on November 29, 1777 the extent of damage done even at this early date.

"Kate has been at Eliz.-Town; found our house in a most ruinous situation. General Dickinson had stationed a captain with his artillery company in it, and after that it was kept for a bullock's guard. Kate waited on the General and he ordered the troops removed the next day, but then the mischief was done; everything is carried off that mamma had collected for her accomodation so that it is impossible for her to go down to have the grapes and other things secured; the very hinges, locks, and panes of glass, are taken away."

We know that later on the British made raids upon the house to capture General Livingston. One of these raids took place February 24-25, 1779 when about one thousand men under Colonel Sterling left Long Island crossed over New York Bay, marched over the peninsula, now Bayonne, to Newark Bay and sailed across Newark

Bay to Elizabeth, and marched across the frozen meadows, but due to some confusion they were delayed in getting to Liberty Hall. Warning was given so that General Maxwell who was stationed at Elizabethtown could make some preparation to harass the enemy. Livingston left several hours before the British arrived. The Governor's house was searched and ransacked particularly for papers. These papers were saved by one of his daughters, said to have been Susan, who gave them instead old receipts and legal papers. On their return through Elizabeth the British burned the parsonage and academy of the Presbyterian Church. They were pursued by the Americans and lost several men in the skirmish that followed. Other raids were made by the British on the house during the course of the war. Part of the time the governor's family was at Parsippany to be safe from raids and it was apparently during these periods that the house was ransacked.

In 1787 Livingston served as a member of the Constitutional Convention. He was offered various other posts which he refused. On July 25, 1790 he died at his home at Liberty Hall.

In May 1789 Mrs. Washington was entertained by the Livingstons at Liberty Hall while on her way to meet General Washington.

Brockholst Livingston sold the property in 1798 to George Richard Belasisc; this was the name assumed by George Richard Lord Viscount Bolingbroke and Saint John of Bettersoa who ran away from England with the daughter of Baron Hompasch leaving his wife in London.

The property was sold by Lord Bolingbroke in 1806 to James Eddy who two years later sold to Thomas Salter. It was from Thomas Salter that Peter Kean on March 23, 1811 purchased the property in trust for Susan U. Niemcewicz. Susan Niemcewicz was Susan Livingston, a daughter of Peter Van Brugh Livingston brother of Governor Livingston. She had married John

Kean and upon his death she married ~~Count~~ Julian Ursin Niemcewicz, a Polish litterateur. During her time the third story was added and also a new wing. She changed the name to Ursino in honor of her husband by which name it is still known to the family. Upon her death she willed the property to her grandson John Kean; it has remained in the family ever since, her great great grandson being the present owner.

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Revolutionary History of Elizabeth, New Jersey Prepared by the Sesqui-Centennial Committee, July 4, 1926

A search of Essex County court records

Information from the owner

Walter C. Rott
Supervising Historian

Approved:

SEYMOUR WILLIAMS
SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, F.A.I.A.
District Officer